



FACT SHEET



FINDING THE RIGHT NONCOMMISSIONED OFFICERS FOR THE OBJECTIVE FORCE

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As the Army moves toward standing up the Objective Force, it anticipates dramatic change in doctrine, missions and equipment. The question we confront here is: how do we ensure that we have the right procedures to promote the right soldiers to execute the missions and man the new equipment in accordance with the new doctrine? This project originated before the term "Objective Force" was used to describe the Army's future direction, but not before many of the change concepts incorporated into Objective Force planning were already in place. The project is just now coming to completion.

In this project, known as 21st Century NCOs, we examine projected changes likely to impact on future non-commissioned officer (NCO) jobs, identified major job dimensions associated with projected future NCO job demands, identified knowledges, skills, and attributes (KSAs) needed to perform these demands, developed measures of these KSAs, and linked them to measures of the identified dimensions of job performance. What we have from this project is a set of measures that could potentially be used in a new promotion system.



1. METHOD

First, we identified several major NCO job dimensions based on current information and projected future changes. Ultimately, we ended up with a list of 27 dimensions, such as cultural tolerance, information management, and leading individual subordinates. The information we

collected on future jobs was based on a systematic review of over 400 documents and interviews with over 300 individuals, many of these carefully selected for their focus on future requirements. Once this information was summarized, it was presented to subject matter expert panels to identify what KSAs would be needed for effective performance on the dimensions identified. From a list of 38 KSAs, the panels selected 19 as particularly important. Some examples are adaptability, problem solving, and self-directed learning. These activities are described in detail in Ford, R. Campbell, J. Campbell, Knapp, and Walker (2000).

We then developed or identified biographical, temperament, situational and cognitive aptitude measures and interviews that addressed these 19 KSAs and several others. We needed to test the effectiveness of these measures in predicting future performance. This required the development of performance measures keyed to the performance of future NCOs. In addition, it required the administration of both KSA and performance measures to over 1891 NCOs across 7 posts and the administration of rating scales to 1018 supervisors. An Observed Performance rating measure, derived from the performance dimensions identified and 2 global ratings, yielded a single composite score. There was also an Expected Future Performance measure which asked raters to project how soldiers would perform in six separate scenarios (Knapp et al., 2002).

2. RESULTS

A number of questions were addressed in analyses reported by Sager, Putka, and Waugh (personal communication, 2002). The first question was whether any of our newly developed attribute measures were significantly related to our measures of performance. Many were, particularly at the E5 level. The most significant relationships

at this level were between Work Orientation (.40 with Observed, .46 with Expected), Leadership (.33, .42), problem solving as measured by responses to a Situational Judgment Test (.39, .37), and Interpersonal Skill (.16, .15) with rated performance. Highest correlations at the E6 level were between problem solving (.25, .28), cognitive aptitude (.19, .20) Interpersonal Skill (.18, .21), Hostility to Authority (-.17, -.15), and Manipulativeness (-.15, -.17) and rated performance.

The second question was the extent to which our newly developed measures could improve upon the current promotion system for sergeants (E5) and staff sergeants (E6). The system is now centered on measures of military skills, training, and accomplishments. A composite score on these indicators was obtained from the individuals tested in this project. This score correlated .19 (Observed) and .13 (Expected) with the rated performance composite at the E5 level and .13 (Observed) and .18 (Expected) with performance at the E6 level.

The temperament, biographical, and situational measures added substantially to the predictive validity of the current system. The temperament Work Orientation scale added .26 (Observed) and .45 (Expected) of incremental validity; the biographical Leadership scale added .23 (Observed) and .38 (Expected), and the situational measure added .20 (Observed) and .26 (Expected) at the E5 level. At the E6 level, the situational measure added .09 (Observed) and .09 (Expected). In general, both zero-order and incremental validities were substantially smaller at the E6 level than at the E5 level.

3. DISCUSSION

The findings were overwhelmingly supportive of the success of the new measures in improving the prediction of performance at the next level relative to the existing promotion system. Several of the measures demonstrated greater predictive power than the existing system, and even demonstrated greater incremental validity than the zero order validity of that system. Use of the new measures hold promise both for present and future application. They predicted both observed performance and performance in the context of expected future conditions.

Three cautions must be presented to qualify these conclusions, however. The first is that

previous research has shown that performance is a complex phenomenon, and that ratings can only incompletely represent the full range of performance. The second is that what predicts performance in a research context may not provide exactly the same level of prediction in an operational context. The third is that information on expected future conditions is unavoidably less than certain.

It is not clear why performance at the higher NCO level was more difficult to predict than performance at the lower level. The spread of scores on the predictor measures did tend to be greater at the lower level, although a correction for restriction in range was applied in an attempt to account for this. The finding that the leading predictors at the higher level were cognitive in nature is consistent with leadership theories that postulate greater cognitive demands as one rises in rank (e.g., Jacobs & Jaques, 1987).

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